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Dramatic Publishing



No Problem

Drama
by
Meg Brogan, Katie Dawson,
Paul Fitzgerald, Susan Fitzgerald, Juliet Howard
Darlene Hunt, Seana Kofod
and Steve Trussell.



The Dramatic Publishing Company

No Problem

Drama. Cast: 2m., 3w. with doubling. Welcome to 6th period English class. The lights go up and we watch five high school students struggle with an essay they must write entitled, "I Am Addicted To ...". Suddenly, the play begins to move fluidly through space and time. It travels from the classroom to Jennifer's bedroom, where she stares at her body in front of a mirror, imagining how she would look if she were thinner; to the fraternity where Paula deludes herself into thinking a college student really cares for her; to Jimmy putting his alcoholic mother to bed; to the locker room where Brian, the star of the football team, wrestles with the loss of the big game; and back to the classroom. **No Problem** is a prevention play which boldly confronts the self-destructive behavior which plagues adolescents today, and it does so on their terms. It doesn't just educate teens about specific disorders, it shows them what destructive behavior looks like in themselves and others. The play is a powerful catalyst for discussion and discovery, as it challenges its audience to question themselves and the choices they make. **No Problem** is ideal for any space or budget and suitable for touring. *Study guide included. Minimal set.*

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NO PROBLEM

by

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JULIET HOWARD, DARLENE HUNT,
SEANA KOFOED, STEVE TRUSSELL**



Dramatic Publishing

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And to
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and Elizabeth
for coming to the party and making it fun.

WHAT IS NO PROBLEM?

NO PROBLEM is a new play that explores the pressures and concerns of high school life as experienced by five students. The lights go up and we watch them struggle with an essay they must write entitled "I Am Addicted To..."

Suddenly, the play begins to move fluidly through space and time. It travels from the classroom to Jennifer's bedroom, where she stares at her body in front of a mirror, imagining how she would look if she were thinner; to the fraternity where Paula deludes herself into thinking a college student really cares for her; to Jimmy putting his alcoholic mother to bed; and back to the classroom.

The play was developed collaboratively as part of a seminar at Northwestern University, and later as an independent effort. A company of eight worked through research and improvisation to create a fast-paced 45 minutes of innovative theatrical entertainment. The action flows smoothly between past and present, highlighting relationships both in the home and in the classroom, boldly confronting the self destructive behavior which plagues adolescents today, and it does so on their terms. It doesn't just educate teens about specific disorders, it shows them what destructive behavior looks like in themselves and in others. While **NO PROBLEM**'s approach to the issues dealt with is a direct one, the play is entertaining and humorous. That is one of the chief reasons **NO PROBLEM** has been so well received by students as well as adults in the prevention field. Most of all, **NO PROBLEM** is a powerful catalyst for discussion and discovery, as it challenges its audience to question themselves and the choices that they make. By not offering simple solutions, the play promotes independent thought and breaks down barriers of communication between teens and adults. That is why **NO PROBLEM** affects positive change in teens, parents, and teachers alike.

NO PROBLEM

**A One-Act Play
For Three Women, Two Men, with doubling**

CHARACTER

JENNIFER

JIMMY

PAULA

BRIAN

MELISSA



high school students

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A high school English class.

The premiere production of *NO PROBLEM* was presented on April 4, 1992 at the Illinois Theatre Association Conference in Wilmette, Illinois. It was directed by Susan Fitzgerald. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

Jennifer *Darlene Hunt*

Jimmy *Steve Trussell*

Paula *Seana Kofoed*

Brian *Paul Fitzgerald*

Melissa *Meg Brogan*

NO PROBLEM

AT RISE: *As the play begins, an alarm clock is heard off-stage. The actors are discovered on stage, frozen in positions appropriate for their characters. As they speak, each actor crosses DC and addresses the audience as he/she narrates for another character. The actors should remain neutral and should not "become" their characters until the school bell is heard. They are aware not only of the audience, but of the presence of the other actors. As they finish speaking, each actor crosses and stands behind the chair of the character about whom they speak.*

JENNIFER. 6:00 a.m. Brian Fenway wakes up. He'll run before breakfast. He has to be in top form for the game tonight.

JIMMY. 6:15. Melissa Anne Bainbridge wakes up. She'll take ten minutes to shower, twenty-five minutes for make-up, and twenty-five minutes for hair. She'll wear her new black dress. It makes her look great. She has a reputation to uphold.

PAULA. 6:30. Jimmy Joseph can't wake up. He'll be late for school. Again.

BRIAN. 6:35. Jennifer Scott wakes up. She'll do 100 sit-ups and have a piece of wheat toast and juice for breakfast. She'll walk to school.

MELISSA. 6:45. Paula Dearborn wakes up. She can't wait to tell Anna about Justin. She's finally in love.

ALL. 7:30. *(The sound of the school bell is heard. It lasts five seconds. ALL students, except JIMMY, freeze.)*

JIMMY. Oh, crap! I'm late for school again!

(JIMMY grabs his book bag and jacket off of the floor by one of the bookcases. As he begins to move, the other students unfreeze. They begin to interact with normal classroom banter. They should take no notice of JIMMY, who runs upstage and freezes. The students settle into their seats as they interact. Through the chatter, we hear:)

JENNIFER. Paula, I thought I saw you last night...

(As JENNIFER says "night", the students in unison look directly out front as an "imaginary" teacher gives the students their assignment. There are some nods of acknowledgement. They hold this pose [though not frozen] for five seconds. They then begin to settle down to the task of writing their essays. JIMMY enters the scene in a frenzy, screaming.)

JIMMY *(composes himself)*. Terribly sorry. Please put down your pencils and direct your focus this way. I believe we have a bit of a problem. I've just been accosted by a huge space alien of enormous proportions and I believe it's coming this way. It had soft pudding-like hands which I don't think you'd want on any part of your body. It chased me through the air in a ship shaped like a giant rubber.

BRIAN. How would you know what a condom looks like, Jimmy?

JIMMY. Please get your mind out of the gutter. I was referring to a galosh.

MELISSA. Jimmy, you're safe. Ms. Thompson went to the office.

JIMMY. Oh, so what did I miss?

JENNIFER. In-class writing assignment. Essay. Thesis statement: I am addicted to...Use three supports. Due at the end of the period.

MELISSA. You really wrote all that down?

JIMMY. End of the period? I can't do it! The pressure's too great! My hand is cramping up!

JENNIFER. Sit down, Jimmy! You're gonna get us all in trouble.

JIMMY. So sorry...

JENNIFER. Jennifer Scott. Addiction Essay Outline.

Roman numeral I: Topic sentence—People can be addicted to many things:

- A. Good things: work, fitness, etc.
- B. Bad things: drugs, alcohol

Roman numeral II: reasons teenagers are addicts:

- A. They do poorly in school.
- B. They are not happy at home.

Roman numeral III: Me.

- A. I am not an addict.
- B. I do like to chew a lot of gum.

MELISSA. Melissa Anne Bainbridge. *(She freezes.)*

BRIAN. I am addicted to...*(He freezes.)*

(JIMMY hums the theme to a television game show.)

PAULA. Dear Anna...*(She freezes.)*

JENNIFER. I chew over fifty pieces of gum a day...

JIMMY. I am addicted to jokes...I'm a very funny guy...*(He freezes.)*

JENNIFER. I started chewing gum a lot when I got my braces off. It's also been a big help when I want to lose a few pounds. I have to stay in shape because I just got a spot on the varsity swim team. I have to work extra hard because I didn't swim all summer. Just ate a lot of dorm food, which isn't the healthiest food in the world. Not even close.

(By this time, JENNIFER has moved DC with her notebook. JIMMY has gotten a remote control and a bag of chips from the R bookcase. He enters the scene as MICHAEL. He mimes turning on the TV.)

JIMMY/MICHAEL. Hey, where's mom?

JENNIFER. I don't know...Work?

JIMMY/MICHAEL. What's for dinner? *(He offers her the chips. She pushes them away.)*

JENNIFER. I don't know. Could you please turn that off? I'm trying to think.

JIMMY/MICHAEL. What's the matter with you?

JENNIFER. I'm trying to do this stupid application.

JIMMY/MICHAEL. I thought you told mom and dad you were going to lifeguard this summer.

JENNIFER. I discussed it with mom and dad and we decided it would be more beneficial for me to go to the Summer Honors Institute.

JIMMY/MICHAEL. You mean they decided for you.

JENNIFER. No, they didn't. You don't understand. This will look really good on my college applications.

JIMMY/MICHAEL. College applications? Jennifer, you're a sophomore in high school. Don't let mom and dad push you so hard. Besides, you're already Ms. Perfect.

JENNIFER. Right.

JIMMY/MICHAEL. You have perfect grades, perfect attendance, perfect teeth, and I have no doubt that you will also have the perfect college application. If you want to lifeguard this summer, lifeguard this summer.

JENNIFER. Michael, I'll lifeguard next summer.

JIMMY/MICHAEL. No, you won't. And you're not gonna lifeguard next summer because next summer mom and dad will want you to do something else. And you're not gonna go to the football game Friday night, because Friday night you have to go to dance class, which you don't really want to do either! You never do anything you want to do.

JENNIFER. Stop it, Michael. You don't know what you're talking about.

JIMMY/MICHAEL. You didn't audition for the school play because dad wanted you to go out for the swim team. You didn't go out with Josh because mom and dad didn't like his earring, and you didn't go out for the cheerleading squad because mom and dad thought it would give colleges the wrong impression...

JENNIFER (*cutting him off*). Shut up! (*Pause.*)

JIMMY/MICHAEL. I wouldn't want to spend my summer eating dorm food and doing math problems. I'm starved. When mom gets home tell her I went out for pizza. (*He exits the scene, returns props and takes his seat. He freezes.*)

JENNIFER (*to audience*). There are over 35 different types of chewing gum to choose from. I like making my own choices. (*She sits.*)

(*As JENNIFER sits, PAULA rips a piece of paper from her notebook. The other students unfreeze.*)

BRIAN. Hey, Paula, what are you writing about?

PAULA. I can't tell you.

BRIAN. What do you mean, you can't tell me? (*PAULA shrugs.*) Fine.

PAULA. I'm not writing my essay.

BRIAN (*as he grabs her paper*). Well you must be writing something. Let's see.

PAULA. Hey, come on...give it back.

BRIAN. What's the big deal?

PAULA. Nothing...just can I have it back?

MELISSA. Brian, give it back to her.

BRIAN. What, is it a secret?

PAULA. No, it's not a secret. Can I just have it back?

(As the above conversation transpires, JIMMY crosses between BRIAN and PAULA.)

JIMMY. Hey, come on, you guys...(He grabs the paper from BRIAN's hand.) Interception!

PAULA. Jimmy!

JIMMY. Paula Dearborn's deepest, darkest secrets...I'll start the bidding at ten dollars...(The students shout out bids as JIMMY waves PAULA's letter around.)

PAULA (*shouting*). Jimmy, give it back! (*There is an awkward moment. Then JIMMY gives the letter back. There are giggles from the rest of the class. To JIMMY.*) You know you're not as funny as you think you are.

MELISSA. Ooh, touchy, touchy. (*ALL students, except PAULA, freeze.*)

PAULA (*writing letter*). Dear Anna. Hi, what's up? Well, I have definitely put Steven behind me and completely forgotten about him. But, I have finally found the right guy! I know last time I told you Steven was the one, but now Justin is. He's my new boyfriend, and he is so great.

We've only known each other a couple of weeks, but I think it's pretty serious. I can't wait for you to meet him.

(By this point, MELISSA has gotten a package from the prop table. She enters the scene as MOM.)

MELISSA/MOM. Paula, honey, you have mail. I think it's a package from your father.

PAULA. Excellent! I bet it's the plane tickets.

MELISSA/MOM. It's a little big for plane tickets. But maybe it's something even better.

(Pause as PAULA waits for her to leave. MELISSA/MOM crosses upstage and freezes, her back to the audience. PAULA opens the package and takes out a letter. BRIAN stands, as DAD.)

BRIAN/DAD. Dear Paula. Hi, pumpkin. How's it going? We've got great news. Cindy's going to have a baby. She's expecting in April, and the doctor thinks she should avoid stress over the holidays. We've decided to take it easy this December so I think we'll have to postpone your visit again. Maybe over the summer would be better, or next fall when you can see your new baby brother or sister. We hope you like the present. Love, Dad...P.S. Cindy sends her love.

(As BRIAN/DAD sits and freezes, MELISSA/MOM unfreezes and crosses to PAULA.)

MELISSA/MOM. So, what did your father have to say?

PAULA. Well, actually, I don't think I'm gonna go this time. Because he's really busy at work and all. So we think it

would be better for me to come over the summer because I won't have school and I can stay longer and the weather's better and...

MELISSA/MOM. Sure. Of course...Honey, you know, if you're not going to visit your dad over vacation you could still enter your sketches in that art show you were talking about.

PAULA. No, they're not that good.

MELISSA/MOM. Paula, they are good.

PAULA. Okay, I'll think about it. *(Pause.)*

MELISSA/MOM. So, what's in the box?

PAULA. Oh, I didn't look. *(She opens the package and pulls out a too-small shirt.)*

MELISSA/MOM. Oh...it looks a little small. Well, maybe we can exchange it, or maybe it would fit your sister...You know, Paula, your dad never was very good at sizing things...Look, why don't I take it to the store with me and see if...

PAULA. No, that's okay. I want to keep it.

MELISSA/MOM. Sure. Whatever you want. *(She crosses back to her seat and freezes.)*

PAULA. I have a whole closet full of clothes that don't fit me. *(She sits and continues writing her letter.)* Anyway, it looks like I won't be going to San Francisco over break... my dad's really bummed, but Justin says he can't bear to be without me for two weeks. *(She freezes.)*

MELISSA *(unfreezes)*. Although I wouldn't consider myself addicted to anything, I am in the habit of going shopping a few times a week. Actually, I go every chance I get. *(She freezes.)*

JENNIFER *(unfreezes)*. For me, chewing gum has gone from a habit to an art. *(She freezes.)*

JIMMY (*as he wanders around the classroom*). I am so very, ultimately, outrageously, out-of-this-world, dynamitely happy that I get to write this paper. I love this paper. You see, (*He sings.*) you might as well face, it I'm addicted to love! Actually, I am addicted to large, robust women, of Armenian descent, who like to eat fish raw and...Oh, shit. (*Crosses out what he's written.*) I am addicted to...jokes. I'm a very funny guy.

(The following scene is played twice. Each time, the students' movements should be exactly the same, except for JIMMY. The movements should be strange, unnatural, and exaggerated. In the original production, the gestures were bold, staccato, and almost robotic. The actors should make reference to JIMMY's empty seat, as though he is actually sitting there, taking part in the conversation. They never actually notice JIMMY, who is standing behind them. During the first scene, JIMMY responds in a naturalistic manner. The second time, JIMMY joins the strange surrealism of the scene. Never should we think that we are actually in the classroom. Unfreeze.)

BRIAN. Oh my God, isn't Friday night Parents' Night?

MELISSA. Why else would I be doing my work?

JIMMY. I hope my mom hasn't heard about it.

JENNIFER. Are everybody's parents coming?

PAULA. I doubt it. Are yours?

JENNIFER. My parents organized it. Just kidding!

MELISSA. My parents will be there. It's their annual parental appearance.

PAULA. Yeah, my mom will be there.

MELISSA. What about you, Jimmy, is your dad as funny as you are?

JIMMY. My dad is dead. *(Laughter.)* I really miss him. *(More laughter.)*

BRIAN. What about your mom? Will she be there?

JIMMY. I hope she doesn't go. I'd be really embarrassed. *(More laughter.)*

BRIAN. Why, can't she get a date?

JIMMY. I'd rather not talk about it. It's kind of personal. *(More laughter. Freeze. JIMMY crosses back to his desk.)*
No one wants to hear your problems.

(Unfreeze.)

BRIAN. Oh my God. Isn't Friday night Parents' Night?

MELISSA. Why else would I be doing my work?

JIMMY. Parents' Night. The next best thing to Disney World!

JENNIFER. Are everybody's parents coming?

PAULA. I doubt it. Are yours?

JENNIFER. My parents organized it. Just kidding!

PAULA. Yeah. My mom will be there.

MELISSA. What about you, Jimmy. Is your dad as funny as you are?

JIMMY. Haven't you heard of my dad? David Letterman? *(Laughter.)* Actually, I'm not sure if that's true. My mom might have made it up! *(More laughter.)*

BRIAN. What about your mom. Will she be there?

JIMMY. Friday night? Friday night she has to make an appearance on "Studs." *(More laughter.)*

BRIAN. Why, can't she get a date?

JIMMY. Well, she's a little short on cash right now. *(More laughter. ALL freeze except JIMMY.)* No one wants to hear your problems. It's easier just to make them laugh.

(Unfreeze. BRIAN picks a piece of paper off of the floor. He throws it to JIMMY.)

BRIAN. Jimmy, go out!

JIMMY. He goes out for the long pass, he connects! *(JIMMY backs up into MELISSA.)* Heal me with a kiss.

MELISSA. Please! You're drooling on my dress!

BRIAN. I wouldn't worry about it. She has a million of them.

JENNIFER. I love that dress.

MELISSA. Thanks, I got it last week.

(JENNIFER pops her gum loudly. PAULA rips a piece of paper out of her notebook.)

BRIAN. God, I hate it when she does that.

PAULA. I'm sorry.

BRIAN. No, I mean Jennifer and her gum disorder.

MELISSA. Brian!

JIMMY. I feel like there's not enough love in this classroom.
(ALL freeze except BRIAN.)

BRIAN *(reading from essay)*. I am addicted to winning. I come from a family of winners. My father has set high standards for my brothers and me to live by. *(He freezes)*.

MELISSA *(unfreezes)*. Shopping is a great way to relax and a great activity to do with friends. On a typical Saturday, I go to the mall, have lunch, walk around, get a make-over, talk to friends, and try on the \$5000 dresses in the ritzy dress store on the top floor. My mother always used to say to me:

JENNIFER/MOM. Melissa, remember, if you look good, you'll feel good!

MELISSA. So, I started small...earrings. I have over 200 pair. I try to pick up a new pair whenever I'm out.